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ABSTRACT

The governance of community colleges in western Canada is increasingly influenced by the activities of federal and regional agencies, provincial legislatures, professional and trade associations, and advisory committees. Decision-making is increasingly centralized so that programs are standardized, procedures are routinized, and colleges lack distinctiveness and professional autonomy. Each provincial legislature has established government departments to direct the operation of post-secondary education. With input from province-wide advisory committees, the civil servants in these departments specify standards of performance, review and approve (or deny) program and budget proposals, and develop policies and programs for administrative services, student services, research, and planning. Boards of trustees hold legal responsibility for the operation of college programs; they formulate policy concerning organization, administration, and course offerings. There are also advisory boards at the institutional level. Not all community colleges have boards of trustees. Technical institutes are operated directly by the governmental departments. In two of the provinces, all board members are government appointees. The growth of collective bargaining may be seen as a coping strategy of the faculty in the face of external pressures to standardize procedures and policies. (DC)

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DECISION MAKING STRUCTURES IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES

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The major purpose of this presentation is to focus upon the structural context of decision-making in post-secondary non-university education in western Canada. Although I shall not describe in detail any one of the systems, I will attempt to identify the common as well as some of the unique features of the decision-making structures that obtain in each of the provinces. My comments may establish the background against which specific issues can be explored. Hopefully, each of you will provide an even greater sense of reality by drawing specifically upon your own experiences and sharing these with us in our deliberations during these days. Following the identification of selected decision-making structures, I will comment briefly on some environmental pressures that have an impact upon these structures.

STRUCTURES

Legislative Authority. In any discussion of educational structures in Canada, explicit reference must be made to the BNA Act. Although federal involvement in post-secondary education is substantial, especially in technical/vocational and Manpower programs, legal responsibility for education resides in provincial legislatures. There are no federal agencies specifically designed to effect decision-making in the community colleges; provincial legislatures are solely

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responsible for meeting the educational needs of society.

Notwithstanding the legal responsibility of provincial legislatures for post-secondary education, the activity of a variety of federal and regional agencies directly affects the nature of the educational program. What at first sight appears to be a unitary system of control in each of the provinces, must be regarded in the light of the undefined, and sometimes difficult to ascertain, interrelationships that emerge in the process of decision-making.

Provincial legislative bodies may be regarded as the most comprehensive structures for decision-making in post-secondary education. Public policies regarding societal goals, provincial and institutional structures, and fiscal priorities develop from the debate within the political forums in each province. And these forums are subject to all of the pressures and influences that are common to political structures.

Departmental Structures. Each of the provincial legislatures has established government departments to direct the operation of post-secondary education. In British Columbia and Saskatchewan the deputy ministers for post-secondary and continuing education, respectively, report to the Minister of Education; in Alberta and Manitoba, separate ministries exist for advanced education and colleges and university affairs, respectively. In each department, civil servants carry the responsibility for the overall planning, development and management of college operations. Compared with college and university operations in the United States, it seems appropriate to suggest that college operations are centralized in western Canada. Departmental involvement in decision-making about college programs is quite substantial in each of the four provinces.

Government departments establish the rules and regulations in college

operations. They specify standards of performance and provide coordination among the various institutions within a system. More specifically, departmental bodies serve a review and approval function for program and budget proposals from individual colleges. They also engage in policy and program development with respect to such matters as administrative services, student services, research and planning.

In addition to the formal departmental structures, advisory bodies exist to provide in-put for departmental units. Most recently, for example, the Alberta government established six advisory committees for the Department of Advanced Education. Members on advisory bodies generally serve by appointment at the pleasure of the Minister.

Institutional boards. The tradition of boards of trustees is well-established in North America. Interestingly, however, governing boards do not exist uniformly for all types of post-secondary institutions in western Canada. Only universities have boards of trustees in each of the four provinces; technical institutes, on the other hand, are operated directly by provincial departments of government in each province. In British Columbia, college boards consist of representatives from supporting school districts and members appointed by government, while in Alberta and Saskatchewan, all college board members are government appointees. Both Alberta and Saskatchewan legislation specifies that the college president, a faculty representative, and a student representative also serve on a college's board of trustees.

College boards, however they are constituted, hold legal responsibility for the operation of college programs. They formulate policy concerning the organization, administration and course offerings of the colleges under their jurisdiction. In British Columbia, where operating budgets are shared be-

tween the provincial and local jurisdictions on a 60/40 basis, boards also become involved directly in setting the mill rate in consultation with participating school districts.

Advisory committees at the institutional level serve institutional needs in much the same way as advisory committees at the provincial level serve the needs of the provincial system. In particular, advisory committees are used extensively in the development of technical and career programs in the colleges and institutes. These bodies develop at the initiative of a local institution and, generally, serve at the pleasure of the administration.

Internal Structures. A great variety of decision-making structures exists within the institutions of the four western provinces. Except for the designation of an institutional head, legislative provisions do not specify the nature of internal decision-making structures. It might be sufficient to suggest that such structures vary not only from institution to institution, but also within a single institution from one administration to the next. Bureaucratic structures are more common on college campuses than are collegial college councils. Administrators, faculty and students often function as separate interest groups on campus. And, of course, provincial and regional professional associations provide additional strength to these separate identities.

The structures for decision-making in post-secondary non-university education in western Canada have many features in common. Provincial systems have emerged that provide distinct levels of decision-making. At the societal level, provincial legislatures set broad policy for college systems; departments of government establish rules and regulations for institutional operations and function as mechanisms for coordination; institutional boards and/or internal structures provide the arrangements for the articulation of priorities and

policies with respect to personnel and programs.

ENVIRONMENTAL PRESSURES

How well the decision-making structures function is, in part, determined by environmental pressures. Of course, the nature of these pressures varies from one system to another, and also from one institution to another. And, indeed, the effectiveness of the structures is also relative to the issue under consideration as well as to the level at which the decision-making occurs. The following comments are indicative of the kinds of issues that could be explored more fully in our discussion sessions.

1. The growth of the non-university segment of post-secondary education is accompanied by a trend toward greater centralization. Concerns for accountability and coordination tend to standardize programs and routinize procedures.

2. Multiple types of institutions with divergent needs tend to lose their distinctives when they are treated as equals within a single system. Since technical institutes are operated directly by the Department of Advanced Education in Alberta, for example, are they favoured over the community colleges that operate under boards of trustees, or vice versa?

3. The increased involvement of provincial governments in college operations makes decision-making more political and less professional in nature. In many instances, non-educational agencies of government determine policies which affect the colleges, often without the involvement or even the awareness of college personnel.

4. Similarly, governmental agencies at all levels (federal, provincial and regional), as well as trade and professional organizations, influence the

decision-making process through a variety of communication networks. The influence of these agencies can be very substantial, particularly when they remain anonymous.

5. Advisory groups have recently emerged in the college environment and, as quasi-public bodies, they constitute an additional threat to professional autonomy. What is the relationship, for example, between provincial advisory groups and institutional boards?

6. As staff professionalization increases, new demands are made for participation at all levels of decision-making. Faculty and student representation on boards may be viewed as mere tokenism, particularly if political factors appear to determine college operations. The growth of collective action may be regarded as a coping strategy of the faculty in the face of external pressure to standardize procedures and policies.

Other sources of external and internal environmental pressures could be identified, but these are sufficient to illustrate ways in which they make an impact upon decision-making structures. New elements in the systems may provide better mechanisms for developing educational programs, or in some instances they actually may frustrate efforts to improve college operations. The emergence of new pressures and the development of new structures should not detract us from the central purpose of educational institutions. Regardless of the level of our involvement in the decision-making process, our concern should be to develop educational programs that will serve the needs of society.

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